Historical pragmatics and early speech recordings: Diachronic developments in turn-taking and narrative structure in radio talk shows

Jucker, Andreas H ; Landert, Daniela

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Diachronic developments in turn-taking and narrative structure in radio talk shows

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Abstract

So far studies in historical pragmatics have invariably relied on written data, but in recent years archives of spoken language have become available that reach back to the early decades of the twentieth century. They make it possible to study the diachrony of spoken language. However, records of dialogic speech that are suitable for a pragmatic analysis are somewhat more recent. One such archive is the collection of podcasts of the popular BBC Radio 4 programme "Desert Island Discs", which reaches back to the 1950s. In these programmes, a well-known person is interviewed on the eight music recordings that they would take along if they were cast away alone on a desert island. They provide half a century of recordings of a communicative situation that has remained more or less unchanged: a radio presenter in conversation with a celebrity.

In this study we analyse diachronic developments in some of the details of the turn-taking system (turn length, question intonation, hesitation markers) and the role they play in the narrative structures of these conversations. The early recordings are styled as interviews in a question – answer format. The radio presenter asks specific questions and adopts the stance of an audience who is unlikely to know the answers to any of these questions. Whether the presenter himself/herself actually already knows the answer is largely immaterial. The celebrity, in turn, provides short, relatively self-contained answers to these questions. In more recent years, however, the presenter and the celebrity are more likely to cooperate in their different roles to jointly produce a narrative. The presenter brings in a larger amount of background knowledge on the details of the celebrity's life, which the audience may or may not share, and encourages the celebrity to pick up the narrative and continue the story. This overall change from an interview format to the format of a shared narrative is reflected in the minute details of the turn-taking system with differences in turn length and the use of question intonation and hesitation markers.

Keywords: historical pragmatics, early speech recordings, diachrony of spoken language, turn-taking, radio, Desert Island Discs

1. Introduction

So far studies of historical pragmatics have invariably relied on written data, and scholars have spent a great deal of effort to assess the legitimacy of written sources for pragmatic investigations. They have argued that speech-related data, such as court records or plays, and dialogic data, such as correspondence, provide sufficiently good approximations of

spoken interaction. Or they have argued that written data can be assessed from a pragmatic perspective in their own right (see Taavitsainen and Fitzmaurice 2007; Kytö 2010; or Jucker and Taavitsainen 2013 for details).

In recent years, however, archives of audio recordings have become available that reach back to the early decades of the twentieth century, and they have opened up a rich potential of research opportunities into the diachronic development of spoken language with a time depth of almost a century. In fact the earliest recordings go back almost 150 years, and many early recordings can easily be found on the Internet, e.g. early recordings of the inventor Thomas Edison (Thomas Edison National Historic Park, New Jersey, http://www.nps.gov/edis/index.htm). But such recordings are rarely suitable for pragmatic analyses. They often consist of just a few sentences, a short poem, a nursery rhyme or a tune from a children's song. Even the recordings from the early decades of the twentieth century that we have been able to locate consist mostly of prepared speeches. Such recordings are fascinating in and of themselves but they offer only limited potential for pragmatic analyses, and they do not offer themselves for any diachronic comparisons across the decades.

For the middle of the last century, however, the available recordings become more varied, and some recordings have appeared that allow a more systematic diachronic analysis. One particular source that has attracted our attention is the programme "Desert Island Discs", which has been produced by the BBC since 1942, has recently been published as an online archive of audio recordings and offers a unique opportunity to study the interaction between the host and a celebrity guest. The archive contains podcasts of approximately half of the nearly 3,000 editions of the programme, and the earliest ones date from the 1950s providing a time depth of some sixty years (BBC Desert Island Discs, http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/features/desert-island-discs/find-a-castaway). Listening to samples of these recordings provides a fascinating journey back in time to the celebrities of previous decades and the listener is struck by the very different style of interaction from the earliest recordings to the most recent ones. We shall introduce these recordings in more detail in the next section.

It is the aim of this paper to pinpoint some of these changes on the pragmatic level and thus to present, what is to our knowledge, the first exercise in historical pragmatics based on audio recordings of spoken language rather than written records, except for the work by Seppänen (1998, 2003) on Finnish demonstrative pronouns in addressing and referring in Finnish, which makes use of tape recordings dating back to the 1950s and 1980s.

2. 70 years of Desert Island Discs

According to BBC's website on Desert Island Discs, the first ever edition was broadcast during the war, on 27 January 1942. The presenter was Roy Plomley, a freelance broadcaster, and the guest who played the role of the castaway was the Viennese comedian, actor and musician, Vic Oliver. The structure of the programme was very similar to what it still is today.

> a well-known person is asked the question, if you were to be cast away alone on a desert island, which eight gramophone records would you choose to have with you, assuming of course, that you

had a gramophone and an inexhaustible supply of needles.
(http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/features/desert-island-discs/about/history-of-desert-island-discs)

In the early years, these interactions were fully scripted and read out by the presenter and the castaway, but from the mid-1950s onwards, the programmes consisted of free conversations (Magee 2012: 52). Desert Island Discs did not air between 1946 and 1951. Soon after it had resumed broadcasting, the programme added two new features. First the castaway was asked about a luxury item that he or she would take along to the desert island and then he or she was also allowed a book in addition to a volume of Shakespeare and the Bible, which were assumed to be available anyway.

Over the seven decades, the programme was presented by only four presenters. Roy Plomley, the inventor of the programme, presented it for over forty years from 1942 until 1985. Michael Parkinson was the presenter from 1986 to 1988. Sue Lawley took over in 1988 and continued until 2006, and since then the programme has been presented by Kirsty Young.

What is particularly striking about this fascinating archive of podcasts of a programme that spans across the six decades are the differences in the style of interaction between the presenter and the castaway. In the early recordings the two interactants followed a strict question-answer format giving the impression of a traditional interview. The language was formal, showing many of the features of the language of distance in Koch and Oesterreicher's (2011) sense (see also Koch 1999). The more recent recordings, on the other hand, give the impression of a joint narrative with distributed roles for presenter and castaway. The language is informal and shows all the hallmarks of the language of immediacy.

With only four presenters, it might be assumed that the differences over the decades are merely differences that are due to personal style and have nothing to do with language change in a broad sense. However, we argue that these differences are not independent from more general style shifts at the BBC. Three of the four presenters were extremely successful and presented the programme for many years, so they must have been right for their time and selected by the BBC because they seemed to be right for the job. It seems intuitively very implausible that the BBC would turn back to a presenter with Plomley's style. Moreover, the trends we observe fit very well with previous accounts of tendencies towards informalization and conversationalization of public discourse (see, for instance, Fairclough 1992, 1995; Hundt and Mair 1999; Linke 2000; Mair 2008; Landert and Jucker 2011). This line of research has shown that stylistic characteristics that are typically associated with informal interaction in private contexts can increasingly be found in texts from public contexts, such as advertising and news writing (Fairclough 1992, 1995), and even in more conservative genres such as scientific writing (Mair 2008). So far, research on this aspect has concentrated on written language and included spoken interaction mostly in an anecdotal way (for instance Linke 2000). Our data can add to this research by providing insights into how the spoken language of a popular radio programme has been affected by these changes.

On this basis, we shall focus on two aspects of the interaction between the presenter and the castaway in particular: the narrative structure and the interactive aspects of the interaction. In the next section of this paper, we are going to present a fairly detailed analysis of three short extracts from the beginning, the middle and the end of our

database in order to highlight some of the diachronic developments of the narrative structure in the programme. We will address the questions of how the presenter and the castaway share the story-telling and what narrative elements each of them contributes. In section 4 we shall take a closer look at the details of the interaction between the presenter and the castaway with a strong focus on the differences on the level of interactivity and formality. Through this we shall try to provide some preliminary quantitative substance to the changes that we identify in the qualitative analysis in section 3. In particular we shall look at turn length, at the frequency and function of hesitation markers, and at the use of question intonation. Although this analysis is interesting because of the diachrony of this new data source, our database is limited and does not allow any far-reaching conclusions. It must also be stressed that the claims that we are able to make for our database cannot easily be generalized beyond our data. Given that our findings are in line with previous descriptions of the informalization and increased linguistic immediacy of public discourse, it may well be that similar developments can be found in interviews and conversations broadcast on the radio more generally, but any specific claims in that direction would require a much larger and more varied database. Our main aim is to demonstrate the usefulness and practicability of using speech recordings as data for an investigation in historical pragmatics.

3. Narrative structure

The following three extracts give an impression of the differences in the narrative structure of the three presenters Roy Plomley, Sue Lawley and Kirsty Young. In this first step of our analysis, we take these extracts as representative both of the respective presenters and the time in which they were broadcast. We quote rather extensively to give a good impression of the style of questioning and the narrative structure in these extracts, and we focus on the contributions of the presenters and omit some of the lengthy contributions of the castaways because the diachronic development in the programme can be seen more clearly in the presenters' contributions. There is a lot of variation in the personalities of the celebrities that appear on the programme, which makes it more difficult to distinguish between the overall diachronic development and the idiosyncratic personal differences. All three extracts are taken from the beginning of the programme, immediately after the signature tune and a brief introduction by the presenter. In the first extract Roy Plomely talks to the musician Dennis Brain. The extract omits Brain's lengthy answers because we want to focus on the way in which the presenter guides the interaction. This programme was broadcast on 13 August 1956 (transcription conventions follow du Bois 1991).

Extract 1: Roy Plomely talking to the musician Dennis Brain (13 Aug 1956)

```
P:                                    [mhm]
   and what's the first record?
B: (…)
P: Heifetz,
   playing guitar, ... (0.8)                                    5
   and what's the second one?
B: (…)
```

P: yes. .. (0.2)
   is this as technically difficult <as> as much of &
   & .. (0.3) Liszt's piano music?
   as <I> I don't know the Dance Of The Gnomes at all.
B: (…)
P: going back to the beginning of your career,
   Dennis, .. (0.3)
   <a> coming from a musical family as you do ... (0.6)
   with <your> your father the .. (0.2) foremost horn &
   & player in the country of his day (H), .. (0.4)
   was it <a> a foregone conclusion that you would be a &
   & musician? ...(1.2)
B: (…)
P: yes, .. (0.2)
   when did you begin your musical training? ... (0.6)
B: (…)
P: had you ever tried to play the horn before,
   had you ever tried your father's instrument? ... (0.6)
B: (…)
P: and when he gave it to you,
   you took to it immediately? .. (0.3)
B: (…)
P: well let's have another record.
   what's number three? ... (0.9)

In this extract we can see that the programme followed a format that was very much based on the pattern of an interview. Plomley asks questions and his guest, Dennis Brain, provides the answers. The questions concern the castaway's choice of music, his career and his experiences. In line 2, Plomely asks for the name of the first record chosen by Dennis Brain. This follows a brief introduction of Dennis Brain as one of the foremost French horn players in the world provided by Plomely and a few questions on the nature of the chosen records. Brain has chosen a recording by Jascha Heifetz. After the end of this first piece, Plomely repeats some of the information on the first recording and immediately follows up with the question for the second recording (line 6), which turns out to be a piano piece by Rachmaninow.

In line 13, Plomely starts with the typical pattern of his early recordings, he asks the castaway about the early stages of his career, and in the course of the programme they progress through the castaway's life so far and the important steps in his career. In his first question, Plomely does provide a few details of the castaway's biography, i.e. that he comes from a musical family and that his father had also been an accomplished horn player. But basically, Plomely sticks to brief questions, often in the form of yes-no questions ("was it a forgone conclusion …?", "had you ever tried …?"), of wh-interrogatives ("when did you begin …?"), or even in the form of assertions with question intonation ("you took to it immediately?"). Thus, the presenter keeps very tight control on the development of the interaction, and the interaction focuses very much on the

castaway's career, his expertise as a professional musician and performer, his instrument, and his choice of records to be taken along to his imaginary desert island.

The second extract is taken from a programme broadcast more than thirty years later, on 28th May 1989. The presenter was Sue Lawley and the castaway was the diplomat Sir Nicholas Henderson, who was British Ambassador to the United States at the time of the Falklands War in 1982.

Extract 2: Sue Lawley talking to diplomat Sir Nicholas Henderson (28 May 1989)

```
L: (H) it was once said,
   that having him in Washington,
   during the Falklands War, .. (0.3)
   (H) was as good as having,
   another battle fleet. ... (0.5)                          5
H: (…)
L: (H)I'm not sure how flattering it is,
   Sir Nicholas,
   to be compared,
   to <a> <a> a battle fleet,                              10
   but I suppose,
   it was meant to be a compliment. ... (1.0)
H: (…)
L: @@@, ... (0.6)
   (H) we used to see such a lot of you,                   15
   I can remember at that time,
   you were constantly--
   marching in and out of meetings,
   <with> with Al Haig,
   and Caspar Weinberger.                                  20
H: (…)
L: but you very much,
   weren't you,
   <the> <the> the voice of Britain in America,
   I don't know whether you did look like a, .. (0.2)      25
   what was it,
   a dilapidated house,
   [but you]
H: [yeah broken] down English [[country]] house.
L:                             [[@ @ @]]                   30
H: [@ @ @ @]
L: [@ @ @] You were due, .. (0.4)
   (H) you were on all the,
   chat shows,
   weren't you? ... (0.8)                                  35
H: (…)
L: @, ... (0.5)
   (H) do you worry about your appearance?
   did it worry you then? .. (0.2)
```

H: (…)
L: how did you,
manage at the time,
to keep in touch <with>,
with the mood here,
cause obviously what you were saying there <was>,
was desperately important for us, ... (0.9)

Extract 2 shows that Sue Lawley uses a style of interaction that is very different from Roy Plomely's more than thirty years earlier. Her utterances reproduced in Extract 2 no longer give the impression of traditional interview questions. They seem more like prompts to get the castaway talking. At the beginning of this extract, which reproduces part of Sue Lawley's opening introduction at the beginning of the programme, she begins with a comparison that equates the diplomat Henderson at the time of the Falklands War with a battle fleet and confronts him with possible reactions. Is this a flattering comparison? Does he understand it as a compliment? Thus she elicits an emotional reaction from the castaway to the way he was seen in the public at the height of his professional career. Lawley does not take him back to the beginning of his career in order to proceed chronologically through the different stages but she goes directly to an incident that might provoke an interesting perhaps even emotional reaction. Sir Nicholas Henderson might have been unhappy with being described as having the same effect as a battle fleet. He answers in good humour and points out that he was more often likened to a "broken down English country house" (not in the extract).

The next two prompts, starting at lines 15 and 22 in the extract, confront the castaway with media images that he created at the time of the Falklands War. He had frequent meetings with the then U.S. Secretary of State Alexander Haig and the then U.S. Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger and he appeared "on all the chat shows". It is obvious that the presenter does not expect simple agreements as answers. Her statements are prompts to get Sir Nicholas Henderson to talk about his experiences surrounding these events. He gives a lengthy answer in which he points out how important the Falklands War had been in the news, and that he was indeed constantly appearing in the media on all the channels, which prompted a friend of his to send some especially effective make-up to cover up the wrinkles. Lawley immediately takes this up and asks him whether he worries – or worried then – about his appearance. And, finally, in this extract, she asks about how he stayed in contact with the public opinion back home in Britain during the events of the Falklands War.

This extract is in many ways typical for Desert Island Discs at this time. Sue Lawley does not ask the relatively simple and narrow interviewer questions that Roy Plomley had used. She prompts her castaway with important moments of his public life and tries to get him to talk about how he experienced the events and how he reacted. The prompts include a certain amount of playfulness by confronting the castaway with what might be perceived humorous but less than complimentary descriptions of him. However, questions about the castaway's career and, of course, about his music choices are also present at this time but they no longer have the same exclusive significance as at the time of Roy Plomley.

Extract 3 is taken from a very recent edition of Desert Island Discs aired on 19th January 2014. Here Kirsty Young talks to the castaway Reverend Rose Hudson-Wilkin.

Extract 3: Kirsty Young talking to Reverend Rose Hudson-Wilkin (19 Jan 2014)

```
Y: she says,
   Oh I have,
   lots of ambition, ... (H)
   you can't be Jamaican,
   and not be ambitious.
   my ambition, ..
   is to enjoy life, .. (H)
   my ambition is,
   to do everything I do, .. (H)
   to the best of my ability,
   and goodness knows,
   Rose Hudson-Wilkin,
   it looks like you do,
   a lot. ... (H)
   when I think of your life,
   I imagine you're just sort of,
   rushing round London,
   wrestling yourself, .. (H)
   in and out of,
   chasubles,
   and cassocks,
   and clerical blouses,
   is that about right? ...
H: (H) [that sounds just about] right.
Y:     [@@@@@@@]
H: [[@@@]]
Y: [[So many]] different jobs,
   and today you are wearing something,
   utterly splendid,
   would you [describe it to me]?
H: (…)
Y: it looks utterly splendid,
   erm your professional life then,
   takes you from Hackney,
   as we know,
   to royal palaces,
   to Westminster, ... (H)
   erm,
   the people that you're,
   preaching to,
   are in very different circumstances,
   in these places,
   do you, .. (H)
```

```
   moderate,
   and change <th>--                                          45
   the way you talk to them,
   and the things you talk to them about? ...
H: (…)
Y: you're such an elegant looking woman,
   and I have heard that you,                                  50
   staged,
   a protest,
   on the roof,
   of your [church],
H:         [@@@]                                             55
Y: it's true,
   is it?
H: (…)
   and so I,
   climbed the roof. .. (H)                                    60
   and,
   stayed there for twenty-four hours.
Y: [did you]?
H: [@@@]
Y: you didn't warn anybody you were [doing it]?              65
H: (…)
Y: I'm just wondering,
   if your husband called you and said,
   Rose, ..
   no,                                                         70
   [<X no I'm X> not agreed with that]
H: [well,
   he's made me] promise,
   not to do anything crazy,
Y: okay.                                                     75
H: again.
```

More than half a century after the programme from which Extract 1 has been taken, Extract 3 shows that the programme still follows the same basic format. The presenter talks to a celebrity castaway about his or her life, but the tone and of the interaction, the respective roles of the presenter and the castaway and the turn-taking details have changed considerably. Even a brief glance suffices to show that Kirsty Young takes much longer turns to ask her questions. In fact, the term "question" does not seem to capture the nature of her contributions adequately. Her first turn in this extract reproduces about half of the opening introduction of the programme. Kirsty Young presents the Reverend Rose Hudson-Wilkin and she does not talk about her career and only in passing about her role in society, but she talks about what kind of person her castaway is. She is Jamaican-born and the first black woman chaplain to Her Majesty the Queen, but in spite of such a remarkable career the presenter quotes her as saying that her ambition is to enjoy life. As her actual prompt for the castaway's first utterance she uses the picture of the different

attires that the castaway has to wear in her hectic life and her many different roles. As a "question" she merely asks Reverend Hudson-Wilkin to confirm this impression, for which she gets a confirmation.

In the continuation, Young even makes reference to the dress that her castaway is wearing during the recording of the programme: "and today you are wearing something, utterly splendid, would you describe it to me?" Later in the programme she also refers to the castaway's dancing during a song that is being played, and thus creates an atmosphere of immediacy and participation for the listeners. Young goes on to talk about the castaway's language and how that may vary in accordance with different audiences and congregations. She brings in an incident in the castaway's life where she staged a protest on the roof of her church, but she does not ask about the details of this event itself. Instead she asks about her husband's reaction.

Thus the three samples reproduced above illustrate the shift from a fairly rigid question-answer format used by Roy Plomely to a format in which the presenter and the castaway jointly tell stories. The focus is no longer on the stages of the castaway's career and his or her expertise in the field he or she is known for but to more incidental details surrounding his or her career, to the details of the immediate context of the recording of the programme and to emotional reactions that certain incidents in the past created for the castaway or the people around him or her. Perhaps the strong focus on the person of the castaway in the more recent episodes is best described in Young's own words:

> And so we come to the interview, the conversation. What's its point, what's the aim? For me it's to strike up an intimacy with the guest that allows them to trust me and in turn properly reveal themselves. I want the listener to come as close as they can to meeting them without actually meeting them. (Young 2012: ix)

This is clearly very different from the "record programme" (Magee 2012: 12) as which *Desert Island Discs* started.

4. Interaction and formality

In the following, we would like to take a closer look at how the differences in the overall narrative structures are related to differences in the turn-taking system and to substantiate some of the claims made above with preliminary quantitative data. For this purpose, we selected a sample of 18 recordings, aired between 1956 and 2014. The sample is stratified over time, so that we included more recordings from presenters who presented the programme over a longer period. The transcriptions cover the first five minutes of each episode, starting with the introduction of the castaway by the presenter. In addition, three episodes – the first, the last and one in the middle of the period – were transcribed in full, in order to let us observe some very general changes in the later parts of the programme. Table 1 gives an overview of the number of episodes and the amount of transcribed data for each presenter.[1]

Table 1: Overview of transcribed data from 18 recordings aired between 1956 and 2014

[1] The stratification is not perfect. For various reasons it was not possible to get an entirely even spread of the data over the period covered in this study.

Presenter	No. of recordings	Duration	No. of words	Words / sec
Roy Plomley	7	43:55	8,286	3.14
Michael Parkinson	2	28:52	6,475	3.74
Sue Lawley	5	27:55	5,562	3.32
Kirsty Young	4	42:37	8,217	3.21
Total	**18**	**2:23:19**	**28,540**	**3.28**

The first characteristic that we looked at in more detail is the length of the introduction, i.e. the very beginning of each episode, in which the presenter introduces and characterises the castaway for the audience. Unfortunately, two episodes presented by Plomley (episodes 3 and 4 in our collection) have survived only in a shortened form and the available audio files do not include the introduction. For this reason, they had to be excluded from this part of the analysis.

The results in Table 2 suggest that the introduction has become considerably longer over the decades. While Roy Plomley spent about 35 words on average on the introduction of his guests, the average introduction of his successor, Michael Parkinson, is about three times as long, namely 103 words. Another increase occurs within the period in which Sue Lawley presented the programme. Her earlier episodes from the late 1980s and the early 1990s were just below 100 words in length. The latest two episodes we have included from her are from the early 2000s. They are considerably longer and one of them is almost 200 words. Kirsty Young follows this trend with introductions of about 150 words on average.

Table 2: Length of introduction in words

Presenter	Episode	No. of words of introduction	Average of presenter
Roy Plomley	1	59	
	2	60	
	3	–	
	4	–	
	5	19	
	6	11	
	7	27	
Total		**176**	**35.2**
Michael Parkinson	8	109	
	9	97	
Total		**206**	**103.0**
Sue Lawley	10	97	
	11	97	
	12	95	
	13	194	
	14	176	
Total		**659**	**131.8**

Kirsty Young	15	113	
	16	128	
	17	171	
	18	191	
Total		**603**	**150.8**

These diachronic changes in the length of the introduction are interesting because the introduction has consequences for the interaction later on. There are clear indications that the length of the introduction is related to differences in style in the later part of the programme, due to the amount and the type of information about the castaway that the introduction presents. In the early episodes, very short introductions provide hardly any information, as can be seen in Extract 4. Plomley introduces his guest with his profession and a very general reference to his achievements. More detailed information about the castaway's career is covered in the main part of the programme with a series of questions and answers, as we have shown in Section 3.

Extract 4: Roy Plomley talking to Sir Anton Dolin (12 June 1982)

```
P: Our castaway this week,
   is a dancer,
   and choreographer,
   who has played,
   an enormous part in the development of ballet in &      5
   & this country, .. (0.4)
   it's, .. (0.3)
   Sir Anton Dolin. ... (1.3)
```

In contrast, Kirsty Young already provides a great deal of information about the castaway's career path and achievements in her introductions. Extract 5 illustrates this point with the introduction of Bear Grylls. After describing the activities for which he is famous (lines 4 to 21), Young tells the audience about the beginning of his career (lines 20 to 22) and the main steps that followed. She also includes reasons for decisions that he took and a quote from Grylls (lines 36 to 44), which can be read as his interpretation of his success. In other words, the type of information that constitutes the core material for the interaction between presenter and castaway of the earlier recordings is covered to a large extent by the much longer introductions of the later recordings. This leaves room for new topics in the main part of the programme in the later recordings, and these new topics, which are less focused on factual information, go hand-in-hand with different styles of interaction.

Extract 5: Kirsty Young talking to Bear Grylls (27 November 2011)

```
Y: My castaway this week,
   is the adventurer,
   Bear Grylls. .. (H)
   He's like a cross,
   between Tarzan and Houdini,                             5
```

```
drinking the liquid from elephant dung,
escaping from a car,
as it plummets from a bridge, .. (H)
even,
eating,                                                    10
live snakes. ... (H)
In fact,
imagine your deepest,
darkest fear, .. (H)
and the chances are,                                       15
Bear Grylls has tackled it. ...
And enjoyed it. .. (H)
A TV star,
his survival shows,
have a global audience of,                                 20
more than a billion. ... (H)
His career began when,
aged just twenty,
he joined the SAS, ... (H)
But then a parachute jump,
went badly wrong.                                          25
He ended up with a broken back,
and had to change his plans. ... (H)
As he lay in his sick bed,
he was inspired by the childhood poster on his +
+ wall, .. (H)                                             30
of the biggest,
baddest,
mountain in the world. .. (H)
He went on to become,
the youngest Briton to reach the summit of Everest. ...35
(H) Life is funny,
he says,
you get focused, .. (H)
start,
pumping out,                                               40
certain vibes into the universe, .. (H)
and things,
often begin,
to collude in your favour. ... (H)
```

One of the linguistic features we analysed is question intonation. It is well known from previous research that not all questions are uttered with question intonation (see e.g. Hayano 2013; Stenström 1984; Stivers 2010). The structure of an utterance is an important indicator of whether or not it has to be understood as a question, but perhaps even more important is context. For our data, the fact that the interaction is an interview means that (turn-final) utterances by the presenter have a default interpretation as

requests for information (see also Jucker 1986). Question intonation is thus not a necessary marker of questions but a stylistic feature that shows an interesting diachronic development in our data.

Table 3 presents the frequency of question intonation in the main part of the programme. The opening introduction is excluded here, since it typically does not contain any question intonation. The frequencies are normalised by the number of words of the presenter, and, thus, are not affected by differences in the length of the contributions by the castaways. The results show that the average frequency of question intonation for each presenter is lower than for their predecessor. Over the entire period of our investigation, the average frequency of question intonation per 1,000 words drops from 63.0 for Plomley to less than half of this, namely 27.1, for Young. There are two main factors that contribute to this result. First, as we have mentioned before, some of Young's turns do not contain any straightforward questions. Instead she presents her own reflections on the castaway, which serve as a prompt for him or her. An example of this can be found in lines 67–71 of Extract 3 above. Rather than asking: "What did your husband say to this?" or "Did your husband agree to this?", she invites her guest to comment on this point with an indirect question that refers to her own speculation: "*I'm just wondering* if your husband called you and said, Rose, no, I'm not agreed with that". A similar example is shown in Extract 6 from Young's interaction with composer Randy Newman. In this case, Young confronts her guest with a potentially offending view of him ("you have a reputation for being grumpy") and combines this with a more positive view that she presents as her own impression of him ("you seem pretty affable to me"). Again, her turn serves as a prompt to which Newman then responds. The pattern is continued with the following turn, which is formulated as a statement without question intonation ("So you think you're a pretty upbeat guy"), which leads to further explanations by Newman.

By stating observations rather than asking questions, Young opts for an interactive style in which her turns are less clearly marked as questions. This is in contrast to earlier interviewers, especially Plomely, who clearly marks his turns as questions through intonation (see Extract 1 above). In both cases, the context of the interview means that utterances by the presenter are by default understood as requests for information, regardless of their intonation. In the context of this radio programme, question intonation functions as a stylistic feature that indicates formality by recalling the interview situation and by emphasizing the role division into questioning interviewer and answering guest. Therefore, the decrease in question intonation can be seen as another characteristic that indicates a shift towards a more collaborative style.

Table 3: Frequency of question intonation normalised per 1,000 words of the presenter (not including opening introduction)

Presenter	Episode	No. of words (presenter)	Instances of question intonation	Frequency per 1,000 words
Roy Plomley	1*	797	47	59.0
	2	312	16	51.3
	3	126	11	87.3

	4	209	12	57.4
	5	190	18	94.7
	6	204	9	44.1
	7	209	16	76.6
Total		**2,047**	**129**	**63.0**
Michael Parkinson	8*	919	34	37.0
	9	120	12	100.0
Total		**1,039**	**46**	**44.3**
Sue Lawley	10	298	13	43.6
	11	181	6	33.1
	12	375	12	32.0
	13	229	7	30.6
	14	318	13	40.9
Total		**1,401**	**51**	**36.4**
Kirsty Young	15	275	5	18.2
	16	326	6	18.4
	17	212	7	33.0
	18*	1656	49	29.6
Total		**2,469**	**67**	**27.1**

* Episodes 1, 8, and 18 were transcribed in full. For the remaining episodes only the first five minutes were included.

Extract 6: Kirsty Young talking to composer Randy Newman (19 October 2008)

```
Y: (...)
   I mean,
   with somebody like you,
   who has this legendary status within &
    & music,
   <we we>,
   we think we know,
   the person,
   we don't really know the person,
   <You> you seem pretty affable to me,
   <you> you have a repu[tation] for being &
   & grumpy. ...
N:                        [Really?]
   (H) No, ..
   I'm not--
   I'm not grumpy,
   as a person,
   I don't think.
   Never have been. ... (H)
   I mean, ..
   people figure I'm grumpy,
   because I am,
```

```
   you know, ... (H)
   from my songs,
   where I'm, ..
   not, ..
   sunshine and moonbeams,
   and--
   rainbows particularly. ..
Y: So you think,
   you're a pretty upbeat guy. ...
```

The second reason for the lower frequency of question intonation is the fact that Young's turns tend to be longer than Plomley's. Table 4 presents an overview of the average length of the presenters' turns across the various episodes in our sample.[2] This quantitative overview again shows a relatively clear diachronic trend. Plomley's turns consist of 14.0 words on average. He has a relatively high consistency in average turn length, with all but one episodes falling between 10.5 and 13.0 words. The two episodes by Parkinson both have a higher average turn length, but there is a rather large difference between them and more data would be needed for sound conclusions about the general length of his turns. What is clear, however, is that both Lawley and Young have much longer turns on average than Plomley. For Lawley the average length is 25.9 and for Young 28.1, which is twice the average length of Plomley's turns. In addition, the individual values for all episodes are higher for Lawley and Young than for Plomley, except for the episode with the lowest value by Lawley, which has the same average turn length as the first episode by Plomley.

Table 4: Average turn length of presenter by episode (not including opening introductions)

Presenter	Episode	No. of words (presenter)	No. of turns (presenter)	No. of words per turn
Roy Plomley	1*	797	42	19.0
	2	312	24	13.0
	3	126	12	10.5
	4	209	17	12.3
	5	190	16	11.9
	6	204	17	12.0
	7	209	18	11.6
Total		**2,047**	**146**	**14.0**
Michael Parkinson	8*	919	38	24.2
	9	120	7	17.1
Total		**1,039**	**45**	**23.1**
Sue Lawley	10	298	15	19.0
	11	181	7	25.9

[2] Turns that consist exclusively of backchannels, such as *mhm*, *yeah* and laughter occurring during the turn of the other participant, are not counted as separate turns. The opening introductions were excluded.

	12	375	14	26.8
	13	229	9	25.4
	14	318	9	35.3
Total		**1,401**	**54**	**25.9**
Kirsty Young	15	275	14	19.6
	16	326	9	36.2
	17	212	10	21.2
	18*	1656	55	30.1
Total		**2,469**	**88**	**28.1**

* Episodes 1, 8, and 18 were transcribed in full. For the remaining episodes only the first five minutes were included.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the average turn length of the castaways does not show such a clear diachronic development (see Table 5). In the episodes presented by Plomley, the turns of the castaways tend to be shorter than in the later episodes, which could be related to the stronger focus on factual information. However, there is a great deal of variation across the episodes for all presenters, which seems to suggest that the turn length depends on the castaway to a large extent. As a consequence, it is also difficult to make generalisations about the turn distribution between presenter and castaway (see Table 6). According to our data, the castaways always speak considerably more than the presenters. Young's relative contribution tends to be slightly higher than that of earlier presenters, but, again, the variation across episodes is quite considerable and generalisations are difficult.

Table 5: Average turn length of castaway by episode and presenter

Presenter	Episode	No. of words (castaway)	No. of turns (castaway)	No. of words per turn
Roy Plomley	1*	1,612	42	38.4
	2	733	22	33.3
	3	974	12	81.2
	4	582	18	32.3
	5	638	16	39.9
	6	753	16	47.1
	7	771	18	42.8
Total		**6,063**	**144**	**42.1**
Michael Parkinson	8*	4,354	38	114.6
	9	876	7	125.1
Total		**5,230**	**45**	**116.2**
Sue Lawley	10	637	15	42.5
	11	1,127	7	161.0
	12	635	13	50.2
	13	576	9	64.0
	14	509	9	56.6
Total		**3,502**	**53**	**66.1**
Kirsty Young	15	568	14	40.6

	16	672	9	74.7
	17	751	10	75.1
	18*	3,154	55	57.3
Total		**5,145**	**88**	**58.5**

* Episodes 1, 8, and 18 were transcribed in full. For the remaining episodes only the first five minutes were included.

Table 6: Contribution in words by presenter and castaway (not including opening introductions)

Presenter	**Episode**	**No. of words presenter**	**No. of words castaway**	**Contribution by presenter in % of total words**
Roy Plomley	1*	797	1,612	33.1%
	2	312	733	29.9%
	3	126	974	11.5%
	4	209	582	26.4%
	5	190	638	22.9%
	6	204	753	21.3%
	7	209	771	21.3%
Total		**2,047**	**6,063**	**25.2%**
Michael Parkinson	8*	919	4,354	17.4%
	9	120	876	12.0%
Total		**1,039**	**5,230**	**16.6%**
Sue Lawley	10	298	637	31.9%
	11	181	1,127	13.8%
	12	375	653	36.5%
	13	229	576	28.4%
	14	318	509	38.5%
Total		**1,401**	**3,502**	**28.6%**
Kirsty Young	15	275	568	32.6%
	16	326	672	32.7%
	17	212	751	22.0%
	18*	1656	3,154	34.4%
Total		**2,469**	**5,145**	**32.4%**

* Episodes 1, 8, and 18 were transcribed in full. For the remaining episodes only the first five minutes were included.

As a final characteristic, we will now look at how the use of hesitation markers developed over time. Hesitation markers are among the clearest indicators for spontaneity in spoken language (see e.g. Clark and Fox Tree 2003; Stenström 2011, Jucker forthc.) and, therefore, we expect them to be more frequent for the more recent episodes. This is indeed the case, as can be seen in Table 7. Since the introductions at the beginning of the programme never include hesitation markers, the frequencies are again based on the main part of the programme, excluding the introduction. Young uses hesitation markers between 9.2 and 33.0 times per 1,000 words, with an average of 21.5. This is more than

three times higher than Lawley's and Parkinson's average, and even more than 5 times higher than Plomley's average.

Table 7: Hesitation markers by presenters

Presenter	Episode	No. of words (presenter)	No. of hesitation markers (presenter)	Frequency per 1,000 words
Roy Plomley	1*	797	7	8.8
	2	312	1	3.2
	3	126	0	0.0
	4	209	0	0.0
	5	190	0	0.0
	6	204	0	0.0
	7	209	0	0.0
Total		**2,047**	**8**	**3.9**
Michael Parkinson	8*	919	6	6.5
	9	120	1	8.3
Total		**1,039**	**7**	**6.7**
Sue Lawley	10	298	2	6.7
	11	181	1	5.5
	12	375	0	0.0
	13	229	3	13.1
	14	318	3	9.4
Total		**1,401**	**9**	**6.4**
Kirsty Young	15	275	4	14.5
	16	326	3	9.2
	17	212	7	33.0
	18*	1656	39	23.6
Total		**2,469**	**53**	**21.5**

* Episodes 1, 8, and 18 were transcribed in full. For the remaining episodes only the first five minutes were included.

The absence of hesitation markers in Plomley's turns is remarkable. Our data do not contain any hesitation markers at all for the extracts we transcribed from five of his recordings. In the extract from episode 2, we found a single hesitation marker and there is only one episode for which we found several hesitation markers. This episode, episode 1 in our collection, is an episode that we transcribed in full, which explains, at least in part, why it differs from Plomley's other recordings. The first of the seven hesitation markers appears about one minute into the programme, when Plomley asks his castaway, Dennis Brain, for a clarification of an unclear answer. The second instance occurs during the seventh minute and thus would not have been included in our data if we had only transcribed the first five minutes, as we did for most of the episodes. The remaining five hesitation markers all appear towards the end of the programme when Plomley asks Brain how he would be able to survive on the desert island. Life on the island is a fixed topic

that is addressed towards the end of each programme. Plomley's turns in this section contain several hesitation markers, false starts and self-corrections, as can be seen in Extract 7. These characteristics are all typical of spontaneously produced language (see Koch and Oesterreicher 2011: 54–55) and not representative of his style overall. They suggest that this part is spontaneously formulated and less planned than the earlier sections of the programme. As we discussed above, most of Plomley's interview questions deal with the professional career and expertise of his castaways. The answers to his questions often provide factual information that was probably known to Plomley before the interview, since he always collected information about his castaways before he met with them (Plomley 1975: 27). This made it relatively easy to prepare the interview, given that he could anticipate the answers to his questions. In contrast, this last part of the interview appears to have been prepared to a lesser extent. It is likely that Brain's answers about his survival on the desert island were not known to Plomley beforehand, which may explain the presence of features associated with spontaneously produced language, which are otherwise largely absent from his turns.

Extract 7: Roy Plomley talking to the musician Dennis Brain (13 Aug 1956)

```
P: Well,
   the flour's up to you,
   you'll have to,
   erm, ..
   cultivate whatever kind of,
   wild [corn] there is,
B:      [@@]
P: on the island,
   <pan>,
   er,
   eggs,
   I suppose,
   sea bird's eggs, ..
   well you should be alright for pancakes,
   at any rate.
   [<@ (H) (Hx) @>]
B: [Good].
```

In sum the results of the quantitative analyses provide further evidence for the change in interactive styles that we observed in section 3. Our data do not contain any recordings from the earliest phase of *Desert Island Discs,* when the programmes were still fully scripted. Nevertheless, the earlier recordings give the impression of being far less spontaneous than the more recent ones. Plomley's interview style is characterised by short turns in which he delivers pre-formulated questions. In contrast, later presenters of the programme use increasingly longer turns, fewer instances of question intonation and more hesitation markers. This creates the impression of a spontaneous interaction with the castaway, and the increased immediacy on the linguistic level matches the shift towards topics that focus more on the personality of the castaway than on his or her professional career or expertise.

5. Conclusion

This study has tried to gauge the potential of audio recordings for a study of diachronic pragmatic developments. On the basis of podcasts of the popular BBC Radio 4 programme "Desert Island Discs" we were able to pinpoint specific changes in the narrative pattern and in the interactive style. The overall development towards more collaborative narration and spontaneous interaction, together with a stronger presence of personal topics shows parallels to previous findings of an increase of language of immediacy in public contexts. While previous results were mostly based on written data, our data suggest that similar developments might have taken place in spoken language that is produced for a public audience. This study was based on a very small sample of just one specific radio programme. Further research certainly needs to be carried out to find out whether similar developments can also be found in other radio programmes and perhaps even in other types of spoken language produced for a large audience.

The study is also limited in the sense that it tries to combine the richly contextualized scrutiny of short data extracts inspired by discourse analytical methods with the attempt to uncover trends of developments that must rely on some sort of quantification. These two approaches or aims are not easily compatible. The discourse analytical scrutiny may provide convincing snapshots but these snapshots do not lend themselves easily to any generalizations, which form the basis of claims about diachronic developments. The description of such developments requires a larger database, but an increase of the database must necessarily sacrifice much of contextual richness of the discourse analytical case study.

On a more positive note, however, the study has shown that it is worthwhile to tackle new challenges and opportunities that offer themselves through the increased availability of historical recorded data. It is very likely that more recorded speech data will come to light that are suitable for a diachronic pragmatic analysis. The time depth will remain limited because of the relative recency of the Edinson's invention of speech recording. But new and richer archives of speech recordings might become available and additional resources in historical speech analysis might provide a broader basis of transcriptions and analytical tools to tackle a vast array of interesting questions about the development spoken language use over recent decades.

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